

SESSION 34

(Platform Presentations)

Education, transition, and specialization 5

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ROOM C.E.02

11:10-12:25hrs

34.002

Arts, literature and reflective writing as educational strategies to facilitate empathy and reflexive skills among physiotherapy students

E. B. Cruz¹, C. S. F. Caeiro², C. M. Pereira¹

¹School of Health Care - Setúbal Polytechnic Institute, Setúbal, Portugal, ²Health College of the Polytechnic of Setúbal, Setúbal, Portugal

Purpose: The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the final year physiotherapy students' perspectives about the contribution of arts, literature and reflective writing in facilitating empathy and reflexive skills.

Relevance: The use of arts, literature and reflective writing has becoming increasingly popular in health professionals education, especially in medical courses. Its use increases health professionals' sensitivity to understand the singularity of patients' context and the meaning they give to patients' illness. Through arts and literature, health students develop skills to observe, absorb, interpret and respond empathically to patients' stories. Simultaneously, reflective writing challenges students to reflect about their clinical experiences from the perspective of both themselves and patients. Despite the regular reference to the use of arts, literature and reflective writing in the education of health professionals, research examining its contribution as an educational strategy to promote empathy and reflexive skills in physiotherapy is limited, particularly from the student perspective.

Participants: Following ethical approval obtained from the Ethics Committee of the host Polytechnic students were given an information sheet concerning their participation in the study. Students, who voluntarily decided to participate, signed a consent form. Data were gathered from eighteen students that had successfully completed a course using arts, literature and reflective writing.

Methods: Three focus group meetings using a semi-structured interview schedule were used to collect data. Focus group sessions were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim.

Analysis: Interpretative phenomenological analysis was used to conduct the study and analyze the transcripts.

Results: Three superordinate themes emerged from data Anal **Analysis:** »developmental understanding of the patients' experiences«, »developmental understanding about the self« and »embedding reflection in clinical practice«. Students emphasised an increasingly capability to be sensitive and vicariously experience the others' experience. They discussed their experience in looking at paintings and literary texts as a metaphor of patients and use them to develop imagination and interpretative skills. They feel more competent and skilful in observing, listening and interpreting patients' narratives. Students also reported that they became more aware of themselves, personally and professionally. Through reflective writing students reported they are more capable to think critically about their practice and learning needs for continuous professional development. They considered reflective writing demanding but critical to improve their capabilities to learn through reflection. Finally, students highlighted the contribution of these strategies in making reflection part of their daily practice.

Conclusions: Final year physiotherapy students reported enhanced skills of empathy and reflection, which they related to the educational strategies used in the course.

Implications: This findings support the inclusion of those strategies within the physiotherapy undergraduate curricula, but further studies are needed to examine how those skills impact on students' clinical practice.